



The Cleveland Museum of Art

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TIMELESS TREASURES FROM THE CRADLE OF CIVILIZATION COMING TO CMA

[Archaeologist] Leonard Woolley saw with the eye of imagination: the place was as real to him as it had been in 1500 BC, or a few thousand years earlier.... While he was speaking I felt in my mind no doubt whatever that the house on the corner had been Abraham's.

— Agatha Christie in her autobiography,
as quoted in the catalogue for
Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur

CLEVELAND — Rare and exquisite Sumerian artifacts from the renowned 4,500-year-old Royal Cemetery at Ur — the city famed in the Bible as the home of the patriarch Abraham — will be on view in Cleveland, Ohio, from February 20 through April 23, 2000, when the Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) presents **Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur**, a major traveling exhibition organized by the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia. Admission will be free.

Kate M. Sellers, CMA acting director, believes the show will be very exciting from two perspectives: "First, there's the mystique of seeing in person these traces of the very beginnings of Western civilization. Second is the breathtaking visual appeal of these objects whose timeless design — were it not for the exacting scientific data documenting their discovery — makes it hard to believe they were created so deep in antiquity."

Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur is sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts. The Cleveland showing is supported by The Hershey Foundation, The John C. and Sally S. Morley Family Foundation, and Kohrman Jackson & Krantz.

The Find and its Celebrities

Extravagant jewelry of gold, lapis lazuli, and carnelian, cups of gold and silver, bowls of alabaster, and extraordinary objects of art and culture were among the Mesopotamian treasures uncovered in the late 1920s by renowned British archaeologist C. Leonard Woolley (1880–1960) in a joint expedition by the British Museum and the University of Pennsylvania Museum. One of the most spectacular discoveries in ancient Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq), the royal tombs at Ur opened the world's eyes to the full glory of ancient Sumerian culture at its zenith (2600–2500 BC).

A spectacular find, the Royal Cemetery excavations of that early era in archaeology remain one of the most remarkable technical achievements of Near Eastern archaeology, and they helped to catapult Woolley's career. Indeed at the time of its discovery, the royal cemetery at Ur competed only with Howard Carter's discovery of the intact tomb of the boy pharaoh, Tutankhamen, for public attention. Visitors to the site included Britain's Queen-consort Elizabeth and Iraq's King Faisal.

By the end of the excavation in 1934 Woolley had become, as *The Illustrated London News* termed him, a "famous archaeologist," with his own series on BBC Radio, and in little more than a year he was awarded a knighthood. Mystery novelist Agatha Christie (1891–1976), who spent time with Woolley and his wife and later married Woolley's assistant, M.E.L. Mallowan, melded her observations of the dig into *Murder in Mesopotamia* (1936).

Philadelphia's Objects Coming to Cleveland

The Ur treasures were divided in the 1920s and 1930s among the University of Pennsylvania Museum in Philadelphia, the British Museum in London, and the Iraq Museum in Baghdad and have never again traveled, until now. The Philadelphia collection — which has been on display at the University of Pennsylvania Museum — is visiting eight U.S. cities as this special exhibition before its permanent reinstallation at that museum in 2001.

The Ur site excavated by Woolley and his team contained about 1,800 burials. Woolley classified 16 of these as "royal" based on their distinctive form, their wealth, and the fact that they contained burials of servants and other high-ranking personages along with the "royal" remains.

The Royal Cemetery tomb of Queen Puabi, like the tomb of Egypt's King Tutankhamen, was an especially extraordinary find for being intact, having escaped looting through the millennia. The tomb featured a vaulted chamber set at the bottom of a deep "death pit;" the queen was buried lying on a wooden bier. A *Cylinder Seal* found on her body bears an inscription including her name. The seal is carved in cuneiform and written in Sumerian, the world's first written language.

Puabi wore an elaborate *Headdress* of gold leaves, gold ribbons, strands of lapis lazuli and carnelian beads, a tall comb of gold, chokers, necklaces, and a pair of pendulous, crescent-shaped earrings. Her upper body was covered in a *Beaded Cape* of precious metals and semi-precious stones stretching from her shoulders to her belt, while rings decorated all her fingers. An ornate *Diadem* made of thousands of small lapis lazuli beads with gold pendants of animals and plants was on a table near her head. Two attendants were buried in the chamber with her, one crouched at her head, the other at her feet. Much of Puabi's jewelry, including the diadem, is in the exhibition.

In a pit associated with Puabi's chamber were five armed men, a wooden sled drawn by a pair of oxen, four grooms for the oxen, and a wood chest or wardrobe which probably contained textiles, long since decomposed. Three more attendants crouched near the wardrobe, surrounded by metal, stone and clay vessels. At the opposite end of the pit were 12 female attendants, all wearing less-elaborate versions of Puabi's headdress. Apparently the afterlife sought by the people of Ur included communal beer drinking, because the implements buried with Puabi included a four-foot-long straw of gold for the purpose.

Woolley found many more artifacts, now world-famous in the fields of art, history, and archaeology, in other tombs. From the "King's Grave," the University of Pennsylvania Museum collection includes one of the world's earliest known musical instruments — the so-called "*Great Lyre*" with its original gold and lapis lazuli bull's head and inlaid plaque depicting mythical animals drinking and performing. (The lyre's wooden structure has been reconstructed from the detailed measurements made by the excavators.) Ritual daggers, including one embellished with granulated gold, were status symbols for the men buried at Ur, and, like the lyres, were enumerated in temple inventories as "divine."

An inlaid gaming board, cast silver heads of lions, and a famed statuette of a goat with "fleece" of carved shell, dubbed "*Ram Caught in a Thicket*" by Woolley, all attest to the exceptional artistry of the period, as well as to the global trading practices of Ur's citizens that provided them with limitless combinations of materials.

The exhibition's Cleveland installation concludes with a learning center in which works of art are placed in the context of photomurals of the site and gathered reading materials about ancient Mesopotamia.

Free Events and Public Library Reading List Complement Show

A lecture series will bring to Cleveland some of the nation's leading experts in ancient Near Eastern art and history. A concert of Sumerian music, gallery talks, and intergenerational workshops round out the offerings. Visitors to branches of the Cuyahoga County Public Library may pick up a reading list suitable for various ages. (*See enclosed release listing these and other programs.*)

The Exhibition's Organizers

The University of Pennsylvania Museum was founded in 1887, dedicated to the study of the cultural history and diversity of humankind. An active research and educational institution, the Museum has sent more than 350 archaeological and anthropological expeditions to all parts of the inhabited world. Its

holdings include works from ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Bible lands and the Mediterranean, Asia, Polynesia, Africa, and the Americas.

Co-curators of **Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur** and authors of the exhibition's catalogue are Dr. Richard Zettler, Associate Curator-in-Charge, Near East Section, University of Pennsylvania Museum; Dr. Holly Pittman, Associate Curator, Near East Section; and Dr. Donald P. Hansen, the Stephen Chan Professor of Ancient Middle Eastern Archaeology at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. Kenneth J. Bohac is CMA's curatorial coordinator for the exhibition.

Planning Your Visit

The CMA is regarded worldwide for the superb quality of its comprehensive collection, from its new Egyptian galleries (opened Sept. 1999) to its acclaimed Armor Court, from renowned Old Master paintings to Impressionist masterpieces. Its Asian and pre-Columbian collections are among the finest in North America. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays, plus Wednesday and Friday evenings until 9 p.m. (*See enclosed release about related ancient Near Eastern works in the CMA collection.*)

CMA is the fifth site for the **Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur** traveling exhibition. (It is on view at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington, D.C. through Jan. 17, 2000.) After Cleveland, it travels to the Pierpont Morgan Library (May 2000–Sept. 2000), The Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago (Oct. 2000–Jan. 2001), and the Detroit Institute of Art (Feb. 2001–May 2001).

After the **Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur** exhibition, shows planned at the CMA for 2000 and 2001 include Impressionist portraits, ink paintings from the George Gund collection, modern design, and Indonesian batik. For more information, call 1-888-CMA-0033 or (216) 421-7350, or visit the museum on the web at www.clemusart.com.

Media Sponsorship

Promotional support for the exhibition is provided by *Avenues Magazine* and WCLV 95/5.

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UR IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

Background

Before the time of classical Greece and Rome, before Biblical times, even before the time of the great pyramids in Egypt, the very first urban culture in the Western tradition developed in the city-state of Ur, some 200,000 inhabitants strong. It flourished around 2500 BC.

It was located between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, virtually on the Persian Gulf, in modern-day Iraq. (The Euphrates changed course in antiquity; the gulf reached about 100 miles further inland then.)

Often referred to as the “cradle of civilization,” this area is fabled as the location of the Biblical Garden of Eden. In fact, it is known that the people of Ur believed in a magical garden and in a story of man made from clay. A hero like Noah and a cataclysmic flood are also among Sumerian stories echoed in Judeo-Christian scriptures.

Following explorations there in the mid 19th century and in 1918–19, one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of all time emerged from a joint expedition between 1922 and 1934 by the University of Pennsylvania Museum and the British Museum, led by Sir Leonard Woolley. Woolley’s workers first uncovered a ziggurat, the high mound of which lent the site its modern Arab moniker of Tel al-Muqayyar (Mound of Pitch). They also uncovered various architectural remnants of smaller temples and homes.

Most dramatically, archaeologists found tombs containing the remains of nearly 2,000 people, including royalty whose scores of attendants apparently committed mass ritual suicide for the royal burials. Woolley wrote the following telegram to the University Museum on Jan. 4, 1928 — in Latin, to protect his news from interception: “I found the intact tomb, stone built and vaulted with bricks, of Queen Puabi adorned with a dress in which gems, flower crown, and animal figures are woven. Tomb magnificent with jewels and golden cups.”

Woolley’s subsequent notoriety led to his own program on BBC radio, but worldwide economic depression — and lack of the private sponsorship that benefited Howard Carter’s 1922 “King Tut” discovery in Egypt — ultimately shrouded for the general public for many years the extraordinary beauty and historic importance of the finds at Ur.

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ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Kohrman Jackson & Krantz is proud to sponsor the exhibition *Treasures From the Royal Tombs of Ur* here in our hometown of Cleveland, Ohio. Our firm has been providing legal services to clients ranging from start-up companies to established family businesses and large, publicly-traded companies for over 30 years. This sponsorship is our way of saying thank you to the community where we live and work.

Mesopotamia has always held a special place in the hearts of lawyers because it was there that the Code of Hammurabi -- the collection of laws and edicts of the Babylonian King that provided the underpinnings for commercial, social, domestic and moral life -- was born. We learn about it as first year law students, and we practice it today, applying it to contemporary issues.

We hope that people enjoy seeing and learning about *Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur* along with all of us at Kohrman Jackson & Krantz.

Marc C. Krantz
Managing Partner